Talk:Religious policies of Constantine I

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Confusion and POV

This article is confusing in several ways and often appears to be an opinion essay rather than an encyclopedia article.108.54.57.244 (talk) 00:40, 31 October 2014 (UTC)

Why was contribution deleted?

I posted a well researched contribution, and someone erased it. Can you say why? Briefly, Constantine the Great, was baptized by Pope Sylvester I.— Preceding unsigned comment added by PhilipofJMJ (talk • contribs) 02:42, 13 January 2015 (UTC)

> Your contribution was not in the correct format. I have corrected it and placed it within the text, with a reference and footnote. Yours, GeorgeLouis (talk) 22:16, 14 January 2015 (UTC)
>
> > There are conflicting sources about Constantine's baptism. The sources listed in the article are probably suspect. The sources are about 100 years old (or older) and are recounting old legends about Pope Sylvester, about whom little is known for certain. In particular it recounts a legend of Sylvester baptizing Constantine and curing him of leprosy. There are reasons to doubt this account and to review it for editing.

- Most importantly, it is generally acknowledged by historians that Constantine was not baptized until shortly before his death. This is noted and sourced several places in Wikipedia's discussion of Constantine, including the main article.
- Constantine died in 337 CE, but Sylvester died in 335. Therefore Sylvester could not have baptized Constantine on the latter's deathbed.
- According to the main article on Sylvester, the legends recounted in this article's sources are derived from suspect sources generally considered to be forgeries.

I recommend that the accounts of Sylvester baptizing Constantine be reviewed and, if not amended, at least reconciled with the other well-sourced information provided in other articles on Wikipedia. --Psuliin (talk) 14:46, 5 September 2015 (UTC)

I notice that there has been no further work or discussion on the issue of Sylvester as Constantine's baptizer. Given, as I said, that Sylvester pre-deceased Constantine by about two years, we can safely say that the article's claim about Sylvester is false. Is there any objection to me making that correction, and bringing this article back into line with other articles and well-sourced information on Constantine? Psuliin (talk) 08:28, 1 October 2015 (UTC)

> Go for it! Richard Keatinge (talk) 08:32, 1 October 2015 (UTC)

I made the change to remove references to Sylvester as Constantine's baptizer. I noticed something has been changed since then, however.

My edit noted that Constantine's real baptizer, Eusebius of Nicomedia, was an Arian. Evensteven deleted that reference as "overreaching" and "not relevant".

I'm curious about both of those characterizations. The connection between Eusebius and the Arians is well-established, and is thoroughly discussed in the main article on Eusebius, so mentioning it does not seem to be "overreaching." And the fact that Constantine chose a prominent Arian as his deathbed baptizer seems very relevant in an article about Constantine's religious policies.

I'm minded to put it back in, unless there's a very good reason that addresses both of the arguments noted above.Psuliin (talk) 07:35, 18 October 2015 (UTC)

> Eusebius was a temporizer and a politician, living during the era when the Church was confronting Arianism in its most direct fashion, and often under circumstances that gave rise to violence. The issue was of prime importance in provoking the assembly of the first council of Nicaea and continued well past Constantine's time and Arius' death, involving the Church for decades at both its highest and lowest levels of organization. The politics of the situation swung back and forth throughout much of the fourth century, causing Arianism's best-known opponent Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria to be exiled from his see six times during his life. Eusebius rode the waves, never standing up with the Arians when push came to shove, and never quite rejecting them either, straddling the fence, and remaining securely in his positions of influence throughout that time. His connections to Arianism are quite well known, you are correct. But so is his failure to embrace them. Classifying him as an Arian alone is as overreaching as classifying him anti-Arian. His nebulous stance allowed him to keep his position close to the imperial centers of power, and indeed, his church history slants in the direction of pandering to that power. Nevertheless, his history is generally considered to be dependable, because he didn't extend himself too far from historical truth and expose himself to accusations of falsehood. He was himself an adept politician. And so it was that he came to be present with Constantine during the emperor's last days, and the most senior bishop available to baptize him near the time of his death. (I think the place of Constantine's death was the seat of Eusebius' bishopric, though I could be mistaken.) Constantine's choice of Eusebius was natural from the standpoint of the practices of both the Church and the state. One must remember that the Orthodox view of sacraments is that their validity does not depend upon the clergyman involved. That notion first arose only during the Reformation, at least 1200 years later. Evensteven (talk) 18:25, 19 October 2015 (UTC)

> > Steven, Eusebius was most certainly a politician, but I think it's an overstatement to say that he never embraced Arianism. His defense of Arius at Nicaea is famous, and was so impassioned that he was sent into

exile along with Arius initially. He said at the time that he signed the Council's decision "only with hand, not with heart."

So it seems more accurate to say that he learned from bitter experience that he could help the Arian party only by publicly moderating his positions and keeping close to the centers of power, and in fact that is exactly what he did. He won back Constantine's good graces and from that point on he worked tirelessly to win concessions for Arianism in the Empire.

It is not unfair to say that the defense of Arianism became Eusebius's life's work, and that he made political compromises as necessary to further that work. This in fact is the assessment of several experts. For example, Guido Berndt and Roland Steinacher (Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed, p.14) write, "The emperor Constantine formally adhered to the decision of Nicaea until the end of his life. Eusebius of Nicomedia, however, who had intervened on the side of Arius, became the most important theological advisor to the emperor after 326 and acted as a spokesman for a triple hypostasis theology. Due to his important role, the representatives of this theory, who were critical of the conclusions of Nicaea, were often labelled as 'Eusebians.'"

The man was so central to the Arian movement that those who argued against Nicaea were often called "Eusebians" rather than "Arians." Focusing on the compromises he made rather than what he was trying to accomplish is the approach of a doctrinal purist rather than a historian.

As for Constantine's choice of Eusebius as his baptizer, he could have chosen any ordained priest. As Berndt and Steinacher (and others) noted, Eusebius was one of Constantine's closest advisors. While he was also Bishop of Nicomedia, his selection as Constantine's baptizer emphasizes his importance in the Imperial Court, and that, combined with his advocacy for Arianism, seem very relevant in an article about Constantine's religious policies.Psuliin (talk) 20:02, 19 October 2015 (UTC)

> Fair enough. You seem to have some scholastic support for stronger ties between Eusebius and Arianism, stronger than I have been aware of. I have known that he used his ties to Constantine to try to influence him towards a greater sympathy for Arianism. You are right that Constantine held to the decision of Nicaea to the end, but there is no question at all that Arianism's influence within the Church fluctuated for decades. While the Emperor had political powers to dictate to religious groups, inherent in his office, Constantine himself demonstrated at Nicaea that while he had no qualms about convening the council, he was there to ensure only that the participants came to a decision, which he would then back; and so he did, as evidenced afterward. For him to have done otherwise would have represented not only a recanting of his support for the Church, and declaration of his Christian faith, but also the undoing of his political policy that was geared towards the maintenance of the public peace, which the Arian controversies had disrupted more than once in violence and death. I don't deny Eusebius' position of influence with him, but emperors do not necessarily follow all the advice of their advisors, and neither did Constantine. So, I think it would be appropriate to recognize the influence was there, and to give voice in the article to whatever the scholars say by way of how that influence came to bear on Constantine's religious policies.
>
> However, Constantine's baptism was not a religious policy; it was a "sacrament" (to use the Latin-derived word). You're right that he could have chosen baptism by any priest, and it's quite natural that he chose such a close advisor as Eusebius. It's also right that the Church

would not see (never has seen) any religious conflict in that. But it's also the case that the Church never would recognize a baptism as being any more or less valid for being performed by any one priest/bishop rather than another, save only that the priest/bishop was (at that time) canonically installed in his office and in communion with the Church as a whole (as Eusebius was). And so, as a sacrament, Constantine's baptism was not influenced at all by Eusebius' views, just as nobody else's baptism would be influenced by a baptizer's views. Moreover, Constantine's baptism did not affect his religious policy, as he died shortly thereafter. This may seem (historically) to be a minor point, but it's significance is virtually nil historically. Rather, it's religious. And in particular, it's a point that has arisen in much later times, coming out of Reformation views about the validity of sacraments, ordinations, the function of clergy, and also even later, by resuscitated modern Arianism. This makes it also a point of contention in historical interpretation deriving from the modern day, not from the times of origin, for the view of the Church in Constantine's time (about validity of sacraments) was much the same as today's Orthodox view, which sometimes differs from other modern views. Thus, if we bring up Eusebius' Arian tendencies in reference to the baptism, then we must make clear all this stuff about how sacraments are viewed, by whom, why, etc. And in the end, it doesn't affect Constantine's religious policies because he died shortly after. And that's why I would contend that it's not really relevant to *this* article. I also think it would tend to throw this article off onto a side track that would almost certainly require undue weight to deal with. Let's confine Eusebius' Arian influence here to how it might have influenced Constantine's actual policies during his active reign, and attach mention to those events, rather than over-complicating his baptism. Evensteven (talk) 19:24, 20 October 2015 (UTC)

> Steven, you're arguing something that I'm not contesting. Twice now you've gone off about the sacramental validity of Constantine's baptism, being performed by someone (Eusebius) who may technically have been a heretic and who was certainly a political opportunist.
>
> I don't care about that. It's neither here nor there as far as Constantine's religious policies or Eusebius's political actions are concerned. I'll freely stipulate that the Church's position is that the validity of a sacrament does not depend on the moral character of the person administering the sacrament. I never challenged that idea and honestly I'm not sure why you even brought it up, unless your views about Eusebius are shaped more by doctrinal concerns than historical issues.
>
> We seem to have reached agreement on what I see as the main matter of concern here: Eusebius's involvement in the Arian movement. I will add only that I think it's perhaps naive to focus solely on the sacramental character of Constantine's baptism and ignore its political implications. Granted, it was a pastoral matter: ministering to Constantine as a priest. But almost every decision Constantine made had both a political background and a political impact going forward.
>
> Constantine chose Eusebius as his baptizer. It's not likely that he was completely unaware of Eusebius's work in undermining the Council of Nicaea. In fact I'd say that's practically impossible. That he chose Eusebius despite that is important, but it's even more important that Eusebius was **there to be chosen**. Despite

the fact that he was a prime mover in the Arian party, working to overturn one of Constantine's most important decisions, Constantine made him a central advisor in his court. That fact speaks volumes about Constantine's religious policies, and I think it will be examined more fully when we get around to writing the section on Constantine and Arianism.Psuliin (talk) 17:58, 22 October 2015 (UTC)

> I'd also say we've come to basic agreement, and any differences would be more a matter of emphasis than anything else. I take your most recent points about Eusebius and his place close to Constantine as reasonable. There are maybe only two other things for me to say. First, I know you haven't opposed what I've said about the sacramental nature of Constantine's baptism. The reason I brought it up is that his baptism is therefore a whole additional set of issues from what is central to this article, partly by reason of more modern considerations, and that therefore the place to bring up Eusebius' Arian tendencies is not with his baptism (at least in this article), but rather in direct relation to the religious policies - all of which is why I wanted to take out that text from that particular sentence. Second, the fact that the Catholic and Orthodox churches consider Constantine a saint, a mark of respect coming from ancient times itself, before they were separated by other disagreements, also speaks volumes about his religious policies and how they were viewed by the Church both then and now. Let us recognize that many modern outlooks, scholarly or not, are likely to be highly weighted by how varieties of Christians view history, through the lens of their own religious interpretations, not all of those having to do with Arianism. We will find these religious points of difference among reliable sources and scholars, in addition to any purely scholarly differences there may be, and it will be necessary for the article to clarify and neutrally express those points (and perhaps how they differ). That's a challenge for all editors here to sort out, but I hope that we can improve this article in that regard. It is in need of such careful neutrality. Evensteven (talk) 03:07, 23 October 2015 (UTC)

Legislation against magic and private divination

This section is one-sided POV, and the claim is that it is sourced, but that is questionable. It's a primary source, which has been improperly summarized by editorial POV. The recent edit by Richard Keatinge has helped insofar as some of that POV no longer speaks in WP's voice, but the section is still unhappily unbalanced and geared towards promotion. It seems necessary at a minimum to find some scholarly secondary source to characterize the primary one and eliminate the editorial opinion about it. It is also necessary (to achieve section balance) to find one or more additional sources that speak to the section topic, and give additional insight into the needs addressed by the legislation and some authoritative opinion as to motivations and background. The basis on which recent editing has reversed attempts to address these issues is false and represents an attempt to maintain POV, unwittingly or not. But I do not argue for removal of the material or the primary source themselves, for they are legitimate and can properly form a part of the section. I do object to mis-characterizations of any source, and think there should be a more solid foundation for the

material. Furthermore, the basis on which it is currently present in the article is flimsy enough and represents a sufficiently biased viewpoint that if balance cannot be attained in a reasonable time, then it would be better to remove the section until such time that it can be properly supported.Evensteven (talk) 20:59, 30 August 2015 (UTC)

> The same could be said of the entire article. It frankly reads more like an opinion essay rather than an encyclopedia article. A lot of work needs to done to remove blatant POV and to other balanced sources. Laurel Lodged (talk) 22:37, 30 August 2015 (UTC)
>
> > In addition to rewriting along the lines suggested above, the title seems POV in view of the contents. I wonder if it would be best to move the entire article, leaving only a redirect to Constantine I and paganism? Richard Keatinge (talk) 19:12, 5 September 2015 (UTC)
> >
> > > I think this is a good point. "Constantine I and paganism" makes a much more neutral title, and just as easy to locate the article with (or easier). In fact, it's arguable that the existing title may have contributed to the furtherance of POV within the article itself by predisposing readers and editors alike to look at the whole topic from one skewed viewpoint. Evensteven (talk) 19:31, 5 September 2015 (UTC)
> > >
> > > > I've made the move. I hope this helps. Richard Keatinge (talk) 20:05, 5 September 2015 (UTC)
> > > >
> > > > > The title and content read much better now. However, at this point i think that the entire article could be deleted. I've already copied its content to Persecution of pagans in the late Roman Empire and the results are quite pleasing and in the right context without being too bloated. What do you guys think? Laurel Lodged (talk) 14:42, 6 September 2015 (UTC)
> > > > >
> > > > > > On balance I would suggest that the subject has enough conceptual independence to stand as a separate article, and additionally that this article is not entirely about persecution. Constantine was the emperor of an empire still mainly pagan at all levels, and we mention quite a few examples of the way that he used traditional pagan titles and assumptions as part of his regime. Richard Keatinge (talk) 14:58, 6 September 2015 (UTC)

Yes, I agree with Richard on this point. While the article may have been oriented more narrowly in the past, because of POV, there is a real wider topic here that is worth covering better. It's worth noting that while Constantine's actions represented a major religious break with the Roman past, it did revert to paganism under some later emperors, only to become Christian again yet later. Constantine marks the beginning of the transition, which nevertheless took some significant time, as one would expect in such a wide territory. His own contributions need to be put into the context of what was and was not possible politically in the empire at the time. There are some religious groups who have an axe to grind about how pro-pagan he was, emphasizing his baptism only at the end of his life, and thus trying to throw doubt on the idea that he was pursuing a life that was genuinely Christian. Among these groups are the Jehovah's Witnesses, who object to how he also supported the Nicene council and its condemnation of Arianism as heresy, as their own beliefs hold to a modern form of Arianism. Some others also do not like it that Constantine is regarded as a saint, pointing to similar "pro-paganisms". The article as it was is a far more widely held viewpoint (and scholarly, although still a viewpoint), but the religious controversies feed a need in some to interpret Constantine's history one-sidedly. Scholarly views provide balance through the conflicts, present and past, and do not require absolute consistency in surface appearances. One could not expect the historical reality to look that way either, since politics has always depended upon the possible, even for emperors.

As an Orthodox Christian, I have found the Catholic view of him to look much like the Orthodox (so far as I have seen), both being generally consistent with long-standing accepted scholarship. I don't expect historians generally to view him as a saint, but then the Orthodox don't expect saints to be perfect (or perfectly consistent) themselves, the more so when they have occupied positions of authority that require them to govern, wherein they must act politically and within the constraints of an entire society or realm. The majority-accepted religious view may not accept all some given historian would say about motivations, but neither would a historian be as focused on the effects of policies on the Church. Discrepancies of views are to be expected, but can certainly be accepted and understood to be generally compatible in most cases, and that is the thing that separates mainstream scholarship (religious or not) from views that seek a given end (which tend to end up at the fringes, religious or not). And therein lies the framework for presentation in a neutral, balanced article that covers more of the ground. The current article is too dependent on Catholic/Orthodox refutation of pro-paganism, and doesn't consider politics enough, leaving it not so much incorrect as imbalanced by reference only to religion. It needs extension, probably in many directions.

This whole discussion started with magic and divination, both of which were/are practices condemned by the Church. It's another piece in how Constantine worked to reshape Roman society into a more Christian-compatible mold. So there's a viewpoint that needs not just stating (as the section had done), but needs context (which it did not provide much of), and needs synthesizing into the whole topic of Constantine and paganism (to which end no sources have yet been brought to bear). It's a single-section example for the needs of the whole article. Evensteven (talk) 18:37, 6 September 2015 (UTC)

> Thanks guys. I thought that the entire article was irredeemable but you've won me over. On a related topic, what would you say to Christian persecution of paganism under Theodosius I as a candidate for deletion? Is it not adequately covered in Persecution of pagans in the late Roman Empire? Laurel Lodged (talk) 20:29, 6 September 2015 (UTC)
>
> > Well, even without looking at the articles, it strikes me that the Theodosius article should at least be considered for merging into the more general article. Just how much material could there be that is sufficiently notable? I'm not resistant to an alteration of opinion. I'm just not expecting enough of anything to come up that might cause it to. But I always like to consider merge rather than deletion, if there is any actually notable material or an existing article that might be a good place for it. And it seems to me there is still reason for one article here someplace. Evensteven (talk) 22:49, 6 September 2015 (UTC)

You know, with all the talk about extension of focus into the right topic, I wonder if the right topic (and article title) is not "Religious policies of Constantine I". The stuff about paganism is intimately bound with the stuff about Christianity, and they both belong in any rightful context for presentation. I also know of a number of other articles under Christianity that tie into this in all sorts of ways. Evensteven (talk) 23:05, 6 September 2015 (UTC)

> I'd support the name change to "Religious policies of Constantine I". A much better description of the article at present and of any useful development. Richard Keatinge (talk) 08:32, 1 October 2015 (UTC)
>
> > Changed the name boldly yesterday. Laurel Lodged (talk) 12:43, 2 October 2015 (UTC)
> >
> > > Thanks. Richard Keatinge (talk) 14:31, 2 October 2015 (UTC)
> > >
> > > Thanks. Evensteven (talk) 15:33, 2 October 2015 (UTC)

Why is there nothing about Arianism?

I see a great deal about Constantine's policies on Paganism, which is entirely appropriate to the subject. But Constantine's religious policies also addressed the greatest Christian issue of his time: the Arian heresy. Constantine banned Arianism officially following the First Nicene Council, but gradually scaled back the restrictions and reached tacit agreement with the Arians on many issues. He even kept well-known Arians close in his inner circle. Both of his sons were Arian, as were several of his advisors.

Given the importance of this movement during and after his reign, and the complexity of his dealings with them, it seems to deserve place in any thorough discussion of his religious policies. Was it left out for a reason, or have we just not yet gotten it written? Psuliin (talk) 07:42, 18 October 2015 (UTC)

> I agree that the article focuses on paganism to an unhealthy degree. There should be a section on his attitudes(s) to Arianism. Laurel Lodged (talk) 09:37, 18 October 2015 (UTC)

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